

Further instructions for reading reviews (assignment #3).

While for the summary section of this assignment, your focus should be content (like for assignment #2), in your critical section (critique) your focus should shift onto the author and his/her perspective. For example:

- look at what sources/methods the author has used to gather his/her materials. Is it ethnography? Interviews? Participant observation? Is it analysis of texts? Archival material? Other? Sometimes authors do not tell us upfront what their sources/methods are, but you should still be able to identify them by carefully reading through the text. Detecting the possible or stated sources/methods of an author is already a first step towards looking at their text critically. Once you have identified the sources or methods, you may also comment on whether they are to your satisfaction or if, instead, you think that further or different evidence (or methods) would have been useful too (or even more useful).
- detect the arguments of the author. No author ever states the truth pure and simple. They all interpret their data (provided by their sources and gathered with specific methods) and argue for their interpretation to be valid and convincing. Generally, an article contains both presentation of “facts” (data) and arguments. After having detected the, or some of the, arguments of the author you may evaluate if they are well-supported by evidence. Do such arguments forget, neglect or possibly conceal something that the evidence could possibly or equally suggest (this is one way to understand what we usually call “bias”)? Even further, could there be ways of looking at the same materials (“facts”/data) that are different from the author’s? Here, you can speculate, but always trying to be faithful to the “facts” presented by the author.
- In some cases, bias can be detected when authors use certain debatable concepts (for example, “primitive music”, etc) or when authors use general concepts without telling us what they mean by those concepts (typically with terms such as “globalization”, “modernization”, etc). In such cases you can first of all point out the author’s use of these concepts, and see if the author is actually assuming their meaning without having unpacked their complexity.

Given the limited length of this assignment, I will not be expecting all these aspects to be covered in one review. Undertaking one or two of the tasks outlined above is already an appreciable step towards a good review.